



NCPIE Update

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Afterschool and Family Involvement: Ideas and Voices from the Field

Looking for parent involvement strategies that work? Read on. The hot topic at the March NCPIE meeting was how to increase parent involvement in afterschool programs and community learning centers. Terry Peterson, Director of the Afterschool and Community Learning National Resource Network at the University of South Carolina, presented the results of a recent national survey that gathered the opinions and suggestions of 40 randomly chosen 21st Century Community Learning Center coordinators across the country.

An Overview of the Research Paper: “Increasing Parental Involvement in Afterschool Programs and Community Learning Centers”

Based on the premise that family involvement is very important to student educational success, the purpose of this research project was to discover which family outreach and involvement strategies have the most potential from the point of view of afterschool program directors and practitioners. Data came from a survey of directors of afterschool programs, specifically, 21st Century grantees from 15 states.

21st Century Community Learning Centers

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to afterschool programs. It grew from a budget of \$1 million in 1997 to \$1 billion in 2002 and has remained at approximately \$1 billion for the last several years.

The focus of 21st CCLC programs is an afterschool program model that provides the following services to students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools:

- Academic enrichment activities that can help students meet state and local achievement standards.
- A broad array of additional services designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program, such as drug and violence prevention programs, counseling programs, art, music, and recreation programs, technology education programs, and character education programs.
- Literacy and related educational development services to the families of children who are served in the program.

(The Afterschool Alliance)

The Research and Results

21st CCLC coordinators rated 18 commonly identified strategies for increasing parent involvement. The four most highly rated strategies were:

- Focus on building trusting collaborative relationship among teachers, families, and community members.
- Use various means to communicate with families about their children’s education.
- Create an after school environment that welcomes parents.
- Recognize, respect, and address families’ needs, as well as their differences.

The next highest rated set of strategies included actions that involve specific family participation activities as well as attitudes.

- Sponsor family math and/or family art nights at various times during the year to encourage student-family-school connections.
- Share knowledge of community resources and activities.
- Communicate activities regarding the program through family newsletters.
- Provide translations for families with limited English skills.
- Recruit family volunteers to help with the program.

- Embrace a philosophy of partnership that shares power & responsibility.
- Sponsor workshops for parents in the evenings or weekends

SPECIFIC IDEAS FOR PRACTITIONERS:

The second phase of the study provided “voices from the field” in which afterschool coordinators gave, in their own words, their best ideas for fostering parental involvement. The broad array of ideas presented fit into four general categories:

1. Family and Community Collaborations

- Make sure that the after school program’s focus is in line with the needs of the surrounding community, which will insure community buy in.
- Work together with Parent Teacher Associations.
- Work with local churches to encourage program participation and bring families to the table to work for the betterment of children.
- Encourage parents to visit whenever they can.

2. Family Programs and Activities

- Sponsor regular family night activities where students and families are involved in the planning, implementing, and evaluation of activities in the program.
- Have monthly family meetings based on a survey of needs.
- Plan fieldtrips that involve the children and their parents.

3. Communication

- Talk with parents daily.
- Let the parents know what is going on at the afterschool program.
- Set aside time to call and visit parents in their homes.
- Talk to parents directly and also use surveys to find out what parents are thinking and to determine how to better manage the afterschool program.

4. Parent Needs

- Provide transportation when possible.
- Schedule classes for parents who need their GED.
- Offer parent enrichment classes to empower parents to better help their children.
- Create an environment that welcomes parents, and provide frequent opportunities for parent to come together to learn new skills, to socialize, and interact with other parents.
- Respect the cultural diversity, talents, and contribution that all parents and families can share.
- Introduce families to schools to increase their comfort level at school.
- Provide ideas and workshops for things that families can do to help benefit their child’s education.

Conclusion

Afterschool programs provide a positive venue and time to help engage families in their children’s learning. This research project set out to find out which strategies have the most potential in the afterschool setting from the point of view of people in the field. In this study, the 21st Century Community Learning Center coordinators provide a viable framework, general strategies and specific approaches to increase family involvement and engagement in afterschool programs and in education in general.

(Source: “Family Involvement in Community Learning Centers and Afterschool Programs power point presentation, Terry Peterson, Afterschool and Community Learning Network Occasional Paper 4-Winter 2005-2006; The Connection Collection: School-Family-Community Publications Database annotation)

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